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ABSTRACT

The needs of teachers for high-demand and seasonal films have been met by a cooperative effort of the Berks County Educational Television Committee, local school districts, the Berks and Suburban TV cable companies and the Berks County Intermediate Unit in a project called Operation Cooperation. Regionalization of the instructional media services had made existing instructional materials available to many teachers, and by using television as a delivery system, an efficient method of distribution was employed. The results of this cooperation provided greater availability of software to schools without additional investment. (HAB)

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OPERATION COOPERATION

It was Christmastime, 1975, in Berks County --- everywhere else too, for that matter. The holiday rush was on and the crunch was felt in unexpected places. Miss Berner, who teaches grade 3 was one of approximately 100 teachers in Berks County who many months before had planned to show a popular film to her class. This colorful film (The Little Engine That Could) is extremely popular at Christmastime. It is what her regional film library calls a high-demand, seasonal film. With only four prints on hand, it's likely Berks County had almost 100 disappointed teachers.

As everyone knows, films are expensive and school budgets are limited. It's clear that, economically, film libraries can't logically invest in enough 16mm prints of a single title to satisfy seasonal demands, when the prints would languish unwanted on the shelves for most of the year.

Like the toys --- concerned about reaching their destination on time --- Berks County teachers were concerned. They were concerned that the demand was greater than the supply. They were concerned when their film request slips came back stamped with the all too familiar "Not available this month - please reorder". Also concerned was the Berks County Intermediate Unit --- a regional service agency to public schools. Many persons in many fields - not only education, showed concern.

The needs of teachers for high-demand and seasonal films are being met by a unique cooperative effort of these groups: the Berks County Educational Television Committee, local school districts, the Berks and Suburban TV cable companies and the Berks County Intermediate Unit. We call this unique effort - Operation Cooperation.

The results of this cooperation provide greater availability of software to schools without additional investment, instructional television and Berks Schoolcasting.

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The Berks County Intermediate Unit, an intermediate service agency between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the school districts in a region, was established in 1970. It is one of 29 similar service organizations set up by state legislation. One of the functions of the intermediate unit is an instructional materials service. This branch of the IU serves school districts in Berks County, and, on a contract basis, schools in Schuylkill County --- our neighbor to the north.

In the IMS department, a million dollars worth of film are housed, maintained and distributed. Currently, 80,000 students taught by 3,800 teachers in 29 different school districts of two intermediate units benefit from the service. The collection includes not only films, but a variety of other supportive learning aids. The intricately scheduled distribution system requires two vans and drivers on the road daily.

Newly-acquired materials chosen by teachers who have previewed and evaluated them favorably are checked in and catalogued by IMS personnel. Catalogue entries are written in anticipation of the next printing. The catalogue is distributed to each professional employee in the Berks County and Schuylkill intermediate units.

This regionalization has made existing materials available to many teachers, however, a method of making the most efficient use of those materials still was needed.

Research shows that children learn readily from television. Studies also indicate that they are better motivated and retain a greater degree of information when television is used to augment classroom instruction. The federally-sponsored McMurrin report stated that "technology could bring about a far more productive use of student and teacher time". Sesame Street, a carefully planned and researched program, is an outstanding example of active learning. It uses techniques of commercial TV to sell preschoolers on

letters, numbers, cognition, reasoning and positive social attitudes.

Standards for educational television in Berks County were set down in 1970 before the BCIU and its IMS existed. The Berks County Educational Television Committee, made up of representatives from all levels of education, civic organizations and business, including cable television companies, organized guidelines for local school districts.

Since youth today are a "tube-oriented" generation, the committee considered how television could lend itself to the curriculum. It considered the equipment needed and ways of making the most of available resources. The committee was concerned with how all of this could be done within the economic limitations of local school districts.

Youth, the committee agreed, needed to be motivated. Television could perhaps provide this motivation. Television also could add variety to the learning situation. It could make possible mass presentations of selected information, giving each child a front row seat. It could bring special resources into the classroom, it could take children on field trips otherwise physically impossible. In the hands of a well-prepared classroom teacher, television could become a valuable tool, a supplement to educational programs.

The BCIU's method of software distribution is functioning under the committee's original goals. One of the main objectives of the committee was the standardization of equipment. The committee wanted to achieve basic agreement among the school districts so that each would not go off on its own tangent making difficult the interchangeability of software --- and hardware.

The BCIU's method of software distribution allows for joint purchasing of tapes, materials and equipment, and centralized production.

The committee's third goal, being accomplished by the intermediate unit, was to

utilize existing materials more efficiently through the distribution of 16mm films in other formats. A portion of the IU program therefore has been designed to make the high-demand, seasonal 16mm films, already available to teachers in Berks and Schuylkill counties, more available so that they can have them when they want and need them. It all started in that 16mm film library of the intermediate unit's IMS --- instructional materials service.

To make more effective use of these films, the IMS has been negotiating --- when possible - for their rights. Some film companies are finding it profitable to sell a film and the rights to it, then each year charge a small fee to have these rights renewed.

Once the rights have been acquired, we develop a collection of videotape masters, prepared from 16mm prints. The Intermediate Unit is fortunate in that many materials and the rights to them are received through the Pennsylvania Department of Education and certain commercial agencies such as Screen News Digest and Eastman Kodak.

All school districts in Berks and Schuylkill counties, then can request instructional motion pictures in three different formats: 16mm film, and, when the IMS has duplication rights, reel-to-reel videotape or videotape cassettes. Teachers can order the materials in the format which best suits the equipment available to them.

Another method making more efficient use of materials is through cable television. When the intermediate unit has distribution rights, materials can be transmitted over the cable and received in districts equipped for TV viewing and served by the cable companies. In October of 1975, the intermediate unit initiated instructional television in its local schools, fulfilling one of the countless recommendations of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Berks and Suburban TV Cable Companies --- two of seven such firms in the

area --- have aided with their time and personnel and, in many cases, their equipment. The situation would be even more ideal if this spirit of cooperation would spread to the five other cable companies in Berks County.

Berks and Suburban allow the use of their head-end, where an IMS staff member spends four days a week involved in transmission of educational programs to schools. The programs go out over a special channel with a scrambled signal to project II received as far as 12 miles away in schools having the proper decoding equipment. The staff member spends the fifth day in the IMS production room where duplicates are made from films chosen for transmission during the following week.

Once a month the Berks Instructional Television Curriculum Committee meets to plan the programming. These curriculum and media specialists decide on which of the available materials in the film library will be telecast. Programming revolves around instructional television as well as the broader-based educational television. As a result of the committee's decisions, a daily log is prepared for use by the cable companies, school districts and the IMS staff person in charge.

For the benefit of teachers, a calendar showing dates and times of programs, is sent to participating districts. Programming also is listed according to subject matter. In addition, the calendar shows preview times. Certain materials which may be transmitted for preview purposes only, are shown for evaluation by teachers. Those who watch these shows alert the IMS of their feelings --- positive or negative --- about the programs. Their recommendations are considered when films are being purchased or rights are being negotiated.

By virtue of equipment and location, seven school districts can take advantage of

the cable phase of this program. These districts have an approximate total of 32,000 students or half the student population in Berks County. Every other district in Berks County --- and the 12 districts in Schuylkill County can request basically the same materials as those sent over the cable in three formats: 16mm film, reel-to-reel videotape, and videotape cassette. This method of distribution never would have been achieved if it hadn't been for the key ingredient of COOPERATION.

A spinoff benefit and additional evidence of this cooperative spirit is Berks Schoolcasting. It was organized in an effort to more efficiently use a cable channel for the presentation of school-produced programs to the community. Eight high schools, two colleges and the Berks County Intermediate Unit are members of Berks Schoolcasting.

In this phase, the Berks and Suburban cable companies have given member schools exclusive use of a channel for transmission of their programs. Media directors meet once a month to plan the flexible schedule. The community is made aware of this schedule through school newsletters and a weekly listing in the local Sunday newspaper. Occasionally, the cable companies provide the communities with advance notice of programs through paid advertisements in the daily papers. Berks Schoolcasting is one spinoff benefit of the cable phase of this program. Others are bound to surface.

In the meantime, plans are on the BCIU drawing board for distribution of instructional programs by microwave signal which may emanate from the IMS production room. Long range plans include the possible linkage of all school districts in the Berks County and Schuylkill intermediate units through some form of telecommunications. This long-range vision is not beyond the scope of reality because of sound early decisions and the farsighted planning of an interested group of educators and citizens, innovative school districts,

public-spirited cable companies and coordinated by a concerned intermediate unit. In a sense, these four groups recall the Little Engine that saved the day by pulling the train loaded with toys over the mountain to its destination. Just as the Little Engine thought he could, we thought we could.

OPERATION COOPERATION

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"Not available this month; please reorder" was showing up too often on teachers' request slips for 16mm films.

Even though the regional film library in this rural-suburban area houses, maintains and distributes more than 6,000 films, teachers' needs were not being filled completely.

Students in this state are bombarded by Pennsylvania history when they are in fourth grade. It is logical, then, that sometime during the course of the school year, all fourth-graders would be exposed to information about Daniel Boone - who was born November 2, 1738, on a farm in our own Berks County.

Hypothetical Case

The Berks County Intermediate Unit's (BCIU) instructional materials service film library has four 16mm prints of "Daniel Boone". Every fourth-grade teacher in Berks County has decided to show the film just around the anniversary of Boone's birth.

Back to Reality

Obviously, there aren't enough prints of "Daniel Boone" around to meet this high-demand, seasonal need of fourth-grade teachers in 18 school districts.

To better meet these needs, the BCIU has launched a method of software distribution which includes 16mm film, reel-to-reel videotapes, video cassettes and the use of cable television. The BCIU, however, did not do it alone, but was aided by three other key groups:

Berks County Educational TV Committee
Berks & Suburban TV cable companies
Local school districts

Operation Cooperation

The committee started the ball rolling early in 1970 when it set down guidelines for educational TV in Berks County schools. The main objectives were:

1. Standardization of equipment
2. Joint purchasing
3. More efficient use of existing materials
   a. 16mm film
   b. videotape
   c. cable TV

After five years of work and unending cooperation these goals are being achieved.

Ideal

Ideally, this is how the BCIU's distribution system works: the BCIU's instructional materials service purchases four 16mm prints of a particular title. Also purchased are distribution and transmission rights. A small annual fee is paid to renew these rights.

Now the instructional materials service is set to go. It has 16mm films for those school districts which have only film projectors. It can make reel-to-reel videotapes and videotape cassettes for school districts so equipped. And it can transmit the same material over cable television to districts that are in the cable companies' service area and that have the proper decoding equipment.

Berks Schoolcasting

Our public-spirited cable companies also have provided area schools with their own channel so they can transmit school-produced programs --- such as concerts, board meetings and sports events --- to the communities where they are located.

Results of Operation Cooperation

This unique cooperation of an interested group of educators and citizens, innovative school districts, public-spirited cable companies and a concerned intermediate unit has resulted in: greater availability of software to schools without additional investment, instructional television and Berks Schoolcasting.

The Future

Long-range plans include the possible linkage of all districts in Berks County --- and those in Schuylkill County, also served by the IMS --- through some form of telecommunications.